

Mission Capilla de San Elizario  
San Elizario  
El Paso County  
Texas

HABS No. Tex-3106

HABS  
TEX,  
71-SANEL,  
1-

ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA  
District of Texas-3

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Bartlett Cocke, District Officer  
615 Maverick Bldg., San Antonio, Tx.

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TEX.  
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ADDENDUM  
FOLLOWS...

MISSION CAPILLA DE SAN ELIZARIO  
San Elizario, El Paso County, Texas.

Present Owner: Catholic Church: Bishop A.J. Schuler, El Paso, Texas.

Date of Erection: Approximately 1783.

Architect: Unknown

Builder: Unknown

Present Condition: Good; interior has been remodeled and reconditioned after fire in 1935.

Number of Stories: One

Materials of Construction: Adobe, plaster and cottonwood.

Other Existing Records: Various records of the Catholic Church  
Bishop A.J. Schuler, El Paso, Texas.

Additional Data:

"Presidio de San Elzeario, now called incorrectly San Elizario was established as a fort or presidio in 1773. This presidio was formerly established in 1583 on the present site of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico, under the name of Presidio de Nuestra Senora del Pilar y de Glorioso San Jose, and was relocated and changed to present name and site in 1773. At or near this spot Onate on April 20th, 1598, reached the Rio del Norte. Following the course of the Rio del Norte or Bravo passed Chamuscado, Fray Agustin Rodriguez and party in 1581; in 1582 Antonio de Espejo and in 1598 Juan de Onate and his soldier settlers. Here occurred the Salt War in 1877, and here was located the first County Seat of El Paso County, prior to its removal to Ysleta and finally to El Paso." Quotation by the Chamber of Commerce, El Paso, Texas.

The building is built of adobe. Its extremely thick walls are reinforced with adobe buttresses. The entire exterior is plastered and whitewashed. The mission faces west; the belfry centers over the main entrance to the chapel. The apse on the east end consists of three circular niches, each containing an altar, and each treated with an arch on the interior. Interior is completely remodeled and redecorated. Roof is flat and is

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71-SAMEL

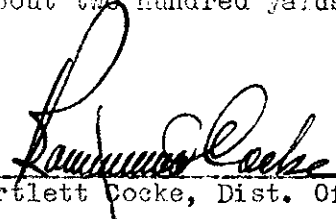
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FOLLOWS...

drained by means of spouts thru parapet walls.

The Mission Faces a public park, one block square.  
The Vice-Regal mansion is located about two hundred yards  
southeast of the Mission.

Author:

  
Bartlett Cocke, Dist. Officer

Date: September 18, 1936.



1/26/37

Iglesia De San Elceario (San Elizario Chapel)  
South side of San Elizario Plaza  
San Elizario  
El Paso County  
Texas

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Addendum to

San Elizario Chapel  
San Elizario  
El Paso County  
Texas  
in HABS Texas Catalog (1974)

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1-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Architectural and Engineering Record  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. TX-3106

## IGLESIA DE SAN ELCEARIO (San Elizario Chapel)

An Addendum to  
San Elizario Chapel  
San Elizario  
El Paso County  
Texas  
in HABS Texas Catalog (1974)

Location:

South side of San Elizario Plaza, San Elizario,  
El Paso County, Texas.

USCS San Elizario Quadrangle Map, Universal  
Transverse Mercator Coordinates:  
13.379245.3494910.

Present Owner:

Roman Catholic Diocese of El Paso, Texas  
1012 North Mesa Street, El Paso, Texas.

Present Occupant:

Roman Catholic Parish of San Elizario.

Present Use:

Roman Catholic Church.

Significance:

The church dominates the village of San Elizario as did its predecessor, the chapel of the Spanish Presidio de San Elceario. The first chapel on the site would have been erected soon after the victim of both neglect and flooding of the Rio Grande during the early nineteenth century. By 1846 when the American Army occupied the former Presidio the chapel was in ruins. A new chapel was begun in 1853, but may have been inadequate since the present structure was begun in 1877. The latest church building survives virtually intact on the exterior despite numerous changes to the interior.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Dates of erection: Begun May 17, 1877, completed by 1882. Dedicated to San Elceario (St. Elzear-a French saint of the thirteenth century) on his feast day, September 27, 1882. (Parish Record Books).

IGLESIA DE SAN ELCEARIO (San Elizario Chapel)  
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2. Original and Subsequent Owners: The church has always been owned by the Roman Catholic Church, although the Diocese to which it belonged has changed as ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the El Paso area has shifted. At the time of its erection, the church was subject to the Bishop of Arizona, Bishop Salpointe [Parish Record Books].
3. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: The building of the church was supervised by the parish priest, Father Bougarde and his successor, Father Echallier.
4. Original plans and construction: The original appearance of the church is unknown. There exists no graphic record or detailed description of its appearance prior to the twentieth century. The earliest photograph of the exterior is dated by an inscription to 1907. This shows the main body of the building in a nearly identical configuration to that in which it presently appears (1980), however above the cornice line, there is considerable difference. In place of the continuous curvilinear gable and rounded bell tower, a triangular pedimented tower projects at the center, and small obelisk-like finials are set at the corners.
5. Alteration and additions: The earliest alteration to the exterior of the church appears to have been the change from the triangulated bell tower to the curvilinear gable which now exists. Comparison of these two towers suggests that the original was merely rounded off rather than rebuilt in rounded form. The central bay of the facade in the earliest illustrations of the building had a rounded statuary niche over a small oculus window which would have provided light to the choir. In later photographs, undated, but presumed to be after 1920, the oculus window has disappeared to be replaced by a taller arched window extending into but not the full height of the niche which has also disappeared. At the cornice line four courses of brick (presumably adobe) corbel out to form the cornice in the earlier photographs, but have since been replaced by a smooth curve to the edge of the cornice. There is no evidence as to whether the corbel courses were obliterated or merely covered in the process. Also visible on the early photographs are quoins at the corners of the front facade. These are only slightly raised and were presumably of stucco. No trace of these can be seen on the present facade. It is not known if the buttresses are original. Most alterations to the interior have been cosmetic in nature. However an undated early photograph of the interior, which might be contemporary with the 1907 view of the exterior, shows a very plain and stark interior, with simple beams and posts completely unornamented. The beams have since been covered by a pressed metal ceiling (date unknown, but before 1932), and the posts have been boxed in by vaguely

IGLESIA DE SAN ELCEARIO (San Elizario Chapel)  
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classical piers, now painted in white gilded details, but originally marbelized [Waterhouse photo]. With the dropping of the ceiling the spans between the piers have been arched. No detailed views of the original interior exist, and interviews with older residents give conflicting stories of how, when, and why the new ceiling was installed, as to whether or not the beams were ever decorated, and also their existence above the metal ceiling. The present interior decoration dates from 1944 [inscription at rear of church]. A fire in 1935 destroyed the adjoining sacristy, which was said to have been part of the "original" chapel, on the east side of the church. The extent of damage to the church building is unknown.

B. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Photographs of the exterior from 1907, c. 1920, c. 1930, the first is in the possession of the parish, and the others are in the El Paso Public Library and Calleros Collection of the University of Texas at El Paso library. An undated view of the interior is in the collection of the El Paso Public Library and may be contemporaneous with the 1907 view of the exterior. Several more recent, hut undated interior views are in the collection of the parish, and a view taken for Mr. Charles E. Waterhouse c. 1932 all show the interior in various stages of development.
2. Bibliography:
  - a. Primary and unpublished sources: The early books of the parish records and notes of recollections and of information extracted from these records left by several parish priests in recent times.
  - b. Secondary and published sources: The National Register of Historic Places Nomination form prepared in 1972. Newspaper clippings. El Paso's Missions and Indians, by Cleofas Calleros, McMath Co. El Paso, 1953.
  - c. Interviews: Numerous interviews with W.H. Timmons of the Department of History, UTEP, older residents of the town, particularly Anna Garcia, in addition to staff of the parish, Father Bertasius, Anna Oporto. August 1980.
3. Likely sources not investigated:

Historic American Buildings Survey documentation of 1936. Records of parish of San Elizario prior to 1845, location unknown, but possibly in Durango, Mexico Episcopal Archives. Juarez Archives (presently uncataloged).

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Since ecclesiastical control over the El Paso area had been shifted so frequently before the establishment of the Diocese of El Paso, other dioceses which controlled San Elizario might have some information in their archives.

Prepared by Christine Saurel  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey Field Team  
November 1980

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Iglesia de San Elceario is an outstanding example of late abobe mission architecture in the West Texan and New Mexican tradition. It reflects the influence of the European architectural styles on the earlier boxlike missions of the region.
2. Condition of fabric: Good to excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: North/South Elevation: 66'  
East/West Elevation: 77'
2. Foundations: The existence of actual foundation is unknown, and the traditional mode of construction would not have had foundations. However a concrete sidewalk and the grading of the site make such determination impossible.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: The walls are of adobe brick with portland cement stucco, white-washed on the exterior. A stucco cross is gilded.
4. Structural system, framing: Load bearing walls of adobe brick masonry. The roof is supported by heavy wooden beams on posts.
5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: A central doorway entrance and side entrances are semi-circular openings, the entry door being recessed slightly, the side doors are surmounted with fanlights.



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- b. Windows: Ten stained glass windows, one to either side of the entrance, three on each side wall and two in the central apse, also one clear glazed casement window, also semi-circular arched, above the main entry door.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Flat roof with raised vent in center, covered with rolled roofing material and gravel. The original drainage system of side canales has been replaced with gutters which drain to the rear.
- b. Cornice: Splayed.
- c. Towers: Central curved portion of gable forms bell tower.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plan: Three aisle, triple apse church, with narthex at entry, and choir loft reached by side stair.
- 2. Stairway: At eastern side of rear, leads to choir loft, has decorative balusters, squared rail and decorative newel post.
- 3. Flooring: Probably pine, laid in herringbone design, not original to structure.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Light green paint on stucco walls, grained paint on plaster to simulate marble wainscoting, piers are white with gold trim, metal ceiling is painted white with light blue, gold, and lilac decoration, elaborate wall decorations portray angels holding various religious symbols: "Ave Maria" on a banner over the East Chapel, and the monstrance over the central apse. In other spandrels of the running arches between the piers, angels hold palms. A memorial mural on the wall of the narthex is dedicated to the soldiers of World War II from San Elizario in whose honor the church was repainted in 1944.
- 5. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Wood and glass panel doors lead from the narthex to the church on the sides and front. Wood panel doors in semi-circular openings lead to the exterior on the front and West (right) sides and a smaller door leads to the new sacristy.

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- b. Windows: Ten stained glass windows represent flowers, patriotic symbols (the star of Texas on one side of the door and crossed flags to the other side), and religious symbols, (the sacred heart, the crown of thorns, the union of God and man).
- 6. Decorative features and trim: Painted decoration of angels throughout the church, marbelized wood wainscoating, and gold trimmed piers. Stations of the cross.
- 7. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: An evaporative cooling system has been installed.
  - b. Lighting: Electric light from sconces on walls and piers.
- 8. Notable original furniture: Two confessionals, one at either side in the rear.
- 9. Statuary: Two angels in the narthex serve to hold holy water. In the east chapel there are statues of the Virgin Mary, St. Isidore (patron saint of farmers), St. Anthony of Padua, St. Teresa, and St. Agnes. In the west chapel there are statues of Christ with the stigmata and sacred heart, the virgin and child (possibly St. Anne and the virgin), St. Joseph and child. The tabernacle of the altar is flanked with angels. At the main altar, the crucifix with St. John and the virgin, and two angels holding lights. A side altar is dedicated to San Elizario and another holds an icon of the virgin.

D. Site:

- 1. General setting and orientation: The church is on the south side of the plaza, but does not follow true compass directions, only those relative to the plaza. The longitudinal axis runs from north to south relative to the plaza, with the main altar at the southern end.
- 2. Historic landscape design: The early photographs show the church as being on a rise but not as notable as the plateau on which it now stands which would suggest that the grade surrounding the church had been raised somewhat.
- 3. Outbuildings: The rectory is said to be one of the oldest in the town. A shrine to Our Lady of Lourdes is recent.

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Prepared by Christine Saurel  
Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
November 1980

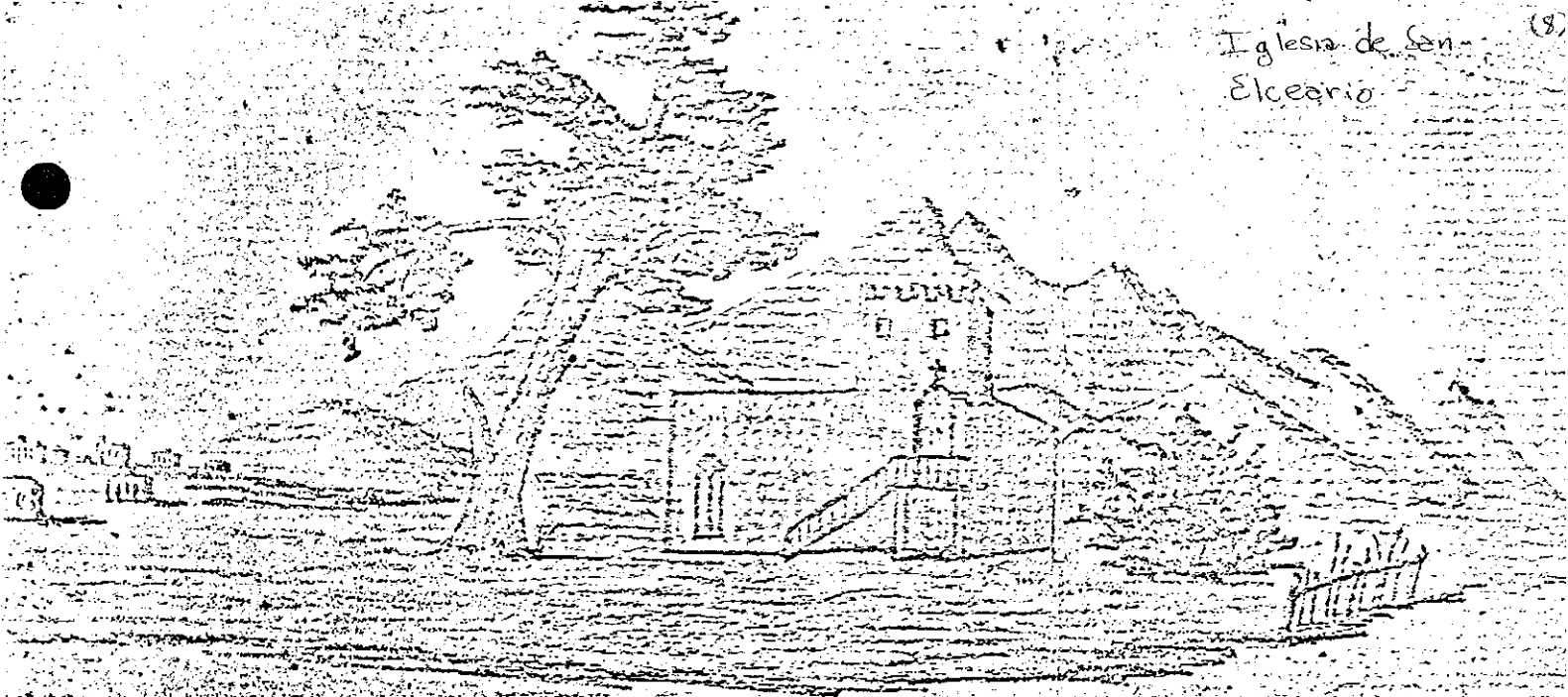
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of Iglesia de San Elceario in San Elizario, Texas was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), National Architectural and Engineering Record (NAER), of the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service (HCRS) in cooperation with the West Texas Council of Government. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was conducted by Project Supervisor Paul D. Dolinsky (HABS Washington, D.C. office), Project Historians Christine Saurel (Columbia University) and Christopher S. Witmer (The Pennsylvania State University), Architectural Foreman Dwight H. Burns (Texas University), Architectural Technicians Ann Louise Barr (University of Arizona), Barry Gill (North Dakota State University), Thomas M. Hocker (The Catholic University of America), and Sandra L. Sherrill (Auburn University), and Architectural Photographer David J. Kaminsky. This project was completed in the HABS field office in El Paso, Texas during the summer of 1980.

Text of Bishop Salpointe's notation on the building of the church. Taken from the Parish Registers, dated 26 July 1877

Pudimos notar Con Satisfaccion que ahi estaba en Curso de Construccion una iglesia nueva, ya bastante elevada en algunas partes. Esta fabrica que se bace bajo la direccion del sacerdote y Con Contribucciones voluntarias de los feligreses, es de forma elegante, bien proporcionada y parece tener todas las condiciones de Solidez que pueden permitir las materiales del pais. Se empezo dicha fabrica el dia de 17 de Mayo de este ano despues de una misa Solemne a la Cual assistieron la mayor parte de los habitantes.

We may note with satisfaction there was under construction here a new church, already fairly well raised in certain places. This work which is being done under the direction of the priest and with voluntary contributions of the faithful, is well proportioned and seems to embody all the conditions of solidity which the local materials permit. The said work was begun the 17th of May of this year after a High Mass which was attended by the greater part of the inhabitants.



San Ildefonso.

(1862)

FACE No. IX-3

U.C. Hist. Papers. E. Text. Arch.

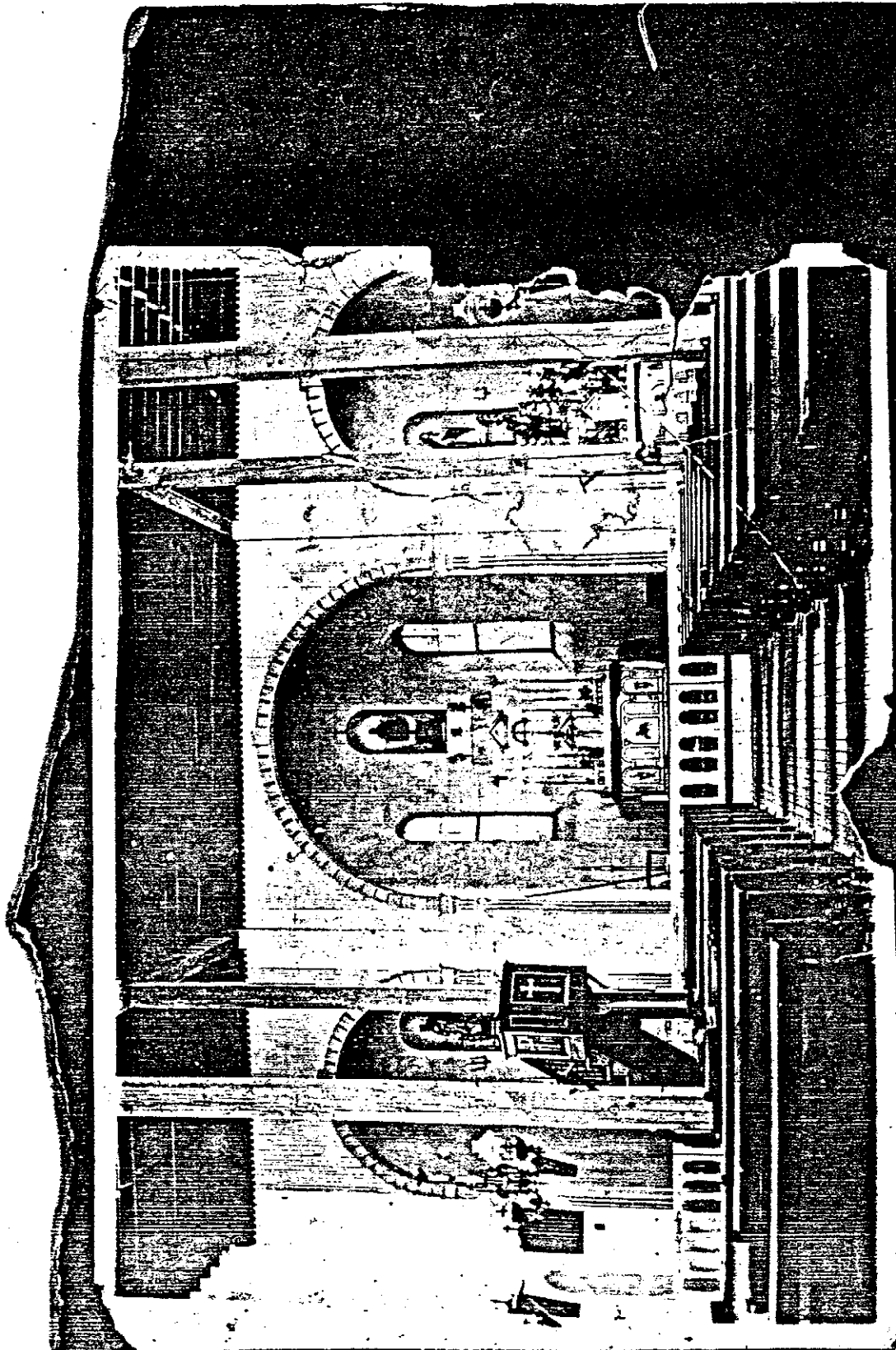
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Iglesia de San Elceario  
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San Elceario Church  
ca 1907

Iglesia de San  
Elcario  
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HABS No. TX-3106



**ADDENDUM TO**  
**IGLESIA DE SAN ELCEARIO**  
(San Elizario Chapel)  
S. side of San Elizario Plaza  
San Elizario  
El Paso County  
Texas

**HABS No. TX-3106**

HABS  
TEX  
71-SANEL,  
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**XEROGRAPHIC COPIES OF COLOR TRANSPARENCIES**

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National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20001